

MORISON  
A Prologue to American History

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A PROLOGUE TO  
AMERICAN HISTORY

*An Inaugural Lecture*

Delivered before the University of Oxford  
on 1 June, 1922

By

S. E. MORISON, M.A.

*Harold Vyvyan Harmsworth Professor of American History  
Lecturer on History, Harvard University*

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## A PROLOGUE TO AMERICAN HISTORY

COMING to Oxford as I have, to study with you a subject hitherto alien to the Modern History School, I have thought it best to don, as it were, the velvet cloak and bay-leaves of the Prologue on the Elizabethan stage. For the Prologue was always given a hearing, however unknown the playwright or critical the audience; through the Prologue the author endeavoured to establish a personal relation between himself and his audience, and to arouse their curiosity and interest in the play that followed. I began to write this prologue a month ago, in the woods of Concord, by a bubbling spring where Henry Thoreau used to pause and drink, when fancy led him that way. The red oak buds were swollen, marsh marigolds flashed out from brook-side verdure, the air was full of birdsong, and of that racy tang that is New England. My pleasant task was finished at Oxford, looking out from Christ Church at the grey walls of Oriel, and at the bright groups of youths and maidens on their way to the river, visible proof that Old England is for ever young. A blackbird whistled outside my window, and the air was sweet and heavy with the may.

Your summons to me, to occupy this new Chair in the most ancient seat of learning in the English-speaking world, is an honour for which I cannot find words to express my deep appreciation. John Dryden in one of his Prologues to the University of Oxford wrote,

Oxford to him a dearer name shall be  
Than his own mother university.

You will hardly expect one so firmly rooted as I am in Harvard University to go so far as Dryden did, after only ten days in Oxford! But I may say that all of you, and more especially the House which has made me its guest, have received me in a spirit of such informal friendliness

that my heart has warmed to you from the first ; and I can hardly persuade myself that I am in a different country from my own. If, then, I speak with a bluntness not usual among speakers on Anglo-American occasions, my excuse will be that you have not given me a realizing sense of being in a foreign land ; that, on the contrary, you have made me feel as in a sort of family party, in which a somewhat devastating frankness is both customary and expected.

American history is no means a new subject to the English universities. Distinguished American historians like James Ford Rhodes and Charles Francis Adams have occasionally lectured here on recent American history. Professor Egerton has taught American colonial and revolutionary history for some years in connexion with his lectures on the British Empire. Only last June the inaugural lecture of a non-academic Chair of American history, the Sir George Watson foundation, was delivered by a distinguished Oxonian whose knowledge of America was equalled by few Americans, and who was loved and honoured by Americans as no Englishman has been in the last century—the late Lord Bryce. But this is, I believe, the first permanent Chair dedicated to American history in any English university.

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It is not, however, the first attempt to found such a Chair. Almost sixty years ago, while the American Civil War was raging, a young graduate of the University of Cambridge, Mr. Henry Yates Thompson, visited the United States. Impressed by the ignorance of America that prevailed among educated people in England, he conceived the plan of founding a lectureship on American history at Cambridge. The lecturer was to have been a citizen of the United States, appointed by the President and Fellows of Harvard University, which was founded largely by Cambridge men. After considerable delay, Mr. Thompson's offer of an endowment for this purpose was submitted by the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge to the Senate. There it was rejected by the emphatic vote of 107 to 81. The circumstances are related in a letter from Leslie



Stephen to James Russell Lowell, then American Minister to Great Britain. It appears that the proposed lectureship had been widely discussed, and denounced as an attempt to introduce democratic and Unitarian propaganda into Cambridge. 'Directly I went into the Senate House yesterday,' writes Mr. Stephen, 'I saw at a glance that we were done for. . . . The sons of Zeruah were too many for us. . . . They began by bemoaning themselves about Democracy without much effect,' but when a clerical speaker announced that the President and Fellows of Harvard were 'Socinians'—it was all over. 'Every intelligent man in the place voted for the professorship, including even Kingsley, . . . but when once the Church is having its foundations sapped, and that by an American democrat, it would be easier to argue with a herd of swine than British parsons.' To which James Russell Lowell replied that he had expected as much. 'I doubt if the lectureship could have done much good. England *can't* like America, and I doubt if I could, were I an Englishman. . . . As for "Socinianism", heavens! we've got several centuries ahead of *that*, some of us, or behind it, if you please!'<sup>1</sup>

What other result could have been expected, indeed, at Cambridge (or at Oxford, for that matter) in 1866? The Church, and the governing classes, then had their backs against a wall, facing the onward march of manhood suffrage; and Mr. Gladstone was about to make a breach in the wall. The mere existence of the American Republic, of democracy victorious and triumphant, was bad enough. But to have this thing taught and propagated at Cambridge by a nominee of that Cardinals' college of Unitarianism, the President and Fellows of Harvard, was too much. As well to-day might Mr. Chicherin offer to endow a chair of Russian history at Harvard!

Conditions of Anglo-American intercourse have changed radically in the last half-century. From an economic view-point America has almost caught up with England, if

<sup>1</sup> *American Historical Review*, xxiii. 603-8 (1918).

industrialization means progress. From a political viewpoint, England has almost caught up with America, if democratization means progress. Your suffrage is now as broad as that in America. Your parliamentary system is even better fitted than our federal government for expressing the popular will ; or at least was before the war. While England has been marching to the left, American institutions have in a sense been deflected to the right, through the increase of executive, and administrative power. Consequently our political paths have come very nearly parallel. Our association in the late war is a new bond, which might perhaps have been more powerful had we not been associates in the late peace. But the Washington Conference has removed much of this post-bellum chill ; and events in Ireland may yet dry up a perennial source of Anglo-American discord.

So now, when England and America are closer in their aims and in their ideals than at any time since the Revolution, it is most fitting that this Chair of American history should be founded by a public-spirited Englishman, in memory of a son who in his brief career showed those qualities which Americans most admire, who was one of that great company of young men who laid down their lives that the lives of both countries might continue. Harold Vyvyan Harmsworth is remembered at Christ Church for his keen interest in economic and social studies, his gift of leadership, his strength of character, and his dauntless courage. As Captain in the Irish Guards he was a splendid officer ; had he been spared, it would have been to a great and useful career.

The study of the history of a people other than one's own can hardly fail to be of value, in broadening sympathies, dispelling prejudices, and fitting one for enlightened citizenship. In that struggle of the arts and sciences on our overcrowded academic stage, Clio is certain of a place within the scope of the pragmatic spot-light. The natural

sciences may occupy the centre; the pseudo-science of economics may shoulder history aside; but she can never be displaced because the others depend upon her. History is to the community what memory is to the individual. Yet the vast majority of those who read history or study history do so for pleasure, and a majority of those who have taken up the investigation, the writing, and study of history as life-work, did so not for any practical reason, not to improve any one, but because they liked it; because they found the story of mankind, with all his nobility and baseness, wisdom and folly, the most interesting and fascinating of stories. Indeed, I suspect that much of our talk about the value of history, however true it may be, is a mere rationalization of the intense pleasure we take in reading history; a necessary defence in this practical age. For my part, I freely confess myself an historical hedonist; one in whom the pursuit of pleasure overlaps the pleasure of pursuit. French history was my first love; but I have found American history equally romantic and passionate, and somehow more humane and pleasant to live with—possibly because the thoughts and actions of ordinary people have entered more largely into her life and character.

It is unfortunate that tradition obliges us to teach history largely in watertight national compartments; but American history, like English history, can be separated with less violence to facts than can the history of continental nations. In other words, one can study in America a people working out its own destiny without external pressure, without the menace of militarism, until recently without the brake of tradition, and even now without the dead weight of caste. Classes we now have in America, and great differences in wealth, and in the privilege that goes with wealth; but apart from the colour line we have no castes. No white American need grow up with a sense of inferiority; he is brought up to believe that he is as good as the next man, and that he has every possibility within him.

The origins of what we call civilization in America are not lost; they are definitely ascertainable. There is a sharp, clear-cut line between anthropology and history, when the first Europeans came to our shores. For a century and more after the voyage of Columbus, American history is but a phase of European history, the colourful and stirring phase of maritime adventure, exploration, colonization. The torch of American history is lighted by such men as Columbus, Bernal Diaz, and Balboa; Admiral Coligny, Jacques Cartier, and Samuel de Champlain; Magellan and the Corte-Reals; Gilbert, Raleigh, and Drake. This first phase passes, and the era of home and community-making begins when about two centuries ago groups of Englishmen and Dutchmen established themselves on the strip of coast between New Spain and New France. From these communities develops in unbroken line the United States.

It would be easy and pleasant for me in my lectures here to dwell largely on this colonial period of American history, which is also a part of British history; on the days before the rupture, when Americans were also Englishmen, and when such English ideals as the colonist deemed most valuable—Puritanism, for instance—were being worked out in a new setting. The study of roots is doubtless profitable, and pleasant for those who do not like the colour of leaves or the taste of fruit; but to learn something about a plant you must give your main attention to what is above ground. It would likewise be pleasant to follow the path of Anglo-American relations to the present, passing by well-worn stepping-stones—the Great Lakes disarmament, Daniel Webster and Lord Ashburton, John Hay and Lord Pauncefoot—to the comradeship of the great war. Here would indeed be a primrose path of dalliance for an American historian in England, but it would not be the path of history. To convey to you the real essence of American history I must stress our differences rather than our resemblances; I must stress America's isolation rather than her European contacts. To do otherwise

would only give a distorted view of the past, and lead to false hopes and expectations.

The English colonies of North America were founded in great part as a protest against the England of the Stuarts. The Puritans emigrated largely in order to save certain English ideals and ways of living that they deemed most precious and which they could no longer realize in England. Our divergence began at Plymouth Rock. It widened and deepened as English institutions themselves diverged from the common background, and as the colonists conquered the interior. To one who dwells on the Atlantic seaboard of America, England seems near by, just over the horizon's rim; but to one dwelling inland, out of sight of the ocean sea, in the deep forest that muffles the roar of easterly gales, England becomes an abstraction, a dream, a sentiment. When the events of 1774 and 1775 destroyed that sentiment, there was nothing left to prevent the political bonds from snapping. Since that time the divergence has been yet more marked, in political, social, and economic life: in race and literature and tradition. Happily there remains a residuum of vital things in common; that common conception of liberty (which Mr. Santayana has so skilfully analysed, and defined as the spirit of free co-operation),<sup>1</sup> a language which we both speak (though, as Bernard Shaw remarked, through different organs!); a sense of stewardship under God for the immense domains which He has permitted us to bring under our respective flags; and a certain sense of superiority over other parts of the world not so favoured.

I yield to no man in my ardent desire that the century of peace between Great Britain and the United States may be perpetual. I look forward to the time when English-speaking nations and dominions will be associates with other liberty-loving peoples in some form of world federation. But I cannot re-orient American history toward that light.

This prologue, however, is becoming too much the sort

<sup>1</sup> *Character and Opinion in the United States* (1920), chap. vii.

of prologue for which Dryden was ridiculed in *The Rehearsal*, where the playwright makes 'use of some certain personal things, which may keep a hank upon such censoring persons as cannot otherwise, 'egad, in nature be hindered from being too free with their tongues'. It is time for the audience to be told what the play is about, and what they may expect to hear.

The nineteenth century in American history will, I think, most interest my fellow students who wish to seek in the past the antecedents of the present United States. It was only at the beginning of the nineteenth century that democracy triumphed in America, as a principle and a policy. It was not until 1815 that America could free herself from foreign entanglements, and turn her face westward. The Monroe Doctrine is not yet a century old. In the sixty years since our Civil War the economic and social basis of American life has changed more than during the previous two and a half centuries, for the economic revolution came later than in England. The frontier has disappeared, Indians and cowboys ride in motor-cars; Kansas is becoming as conservative as Devonshire; industrialism has spread from the eastern seaboard to the west and the south. Lowell once could boast that Uncle Sam's lathstring 'never was drawn in against the poorest child of Adam's kin'; but the immigrants now begin to bring ideas as well as muscle, and we are endeavouring to stabilize our racial contents. America has now a considerable leisure class, living on inherited property, and a proletariat without property or much hope of getting it. Yet the old traditions and institutions born of pioneer farming persist. Americans like to believe that they can go on doing things in the old way. 'Back to normalcy' was the winning cry of our last presidential election. The key to America of the present is this conflict between facts and traditions. Like you we are finding clay feet on some of our most revered gods; yet we loathe the idea of setting up new gods.

Not wishing, however, to rush you into the nineteenth

century without a preliminary canter through the seventeenth and the eighteenth, I have thought best to start on the institutional track, where English historical scholarship has scored so many wins, and which, to judge from the statutes of the University, is still a favourite course for Oxford students of history. My lectures this term will be an attempt to trace, very briefly and sketchily, the development of representative government in America from the first settlements.

Representative government in America developed in a different way from representative government in England. The first English colonists, more by chance than by design, took for their new model governments the charters of joint-stock corporations. Hence the elections at stated intervals instead of at parliamentary crises; hence the superiority of constitutional over statute law, from which developed the American system of judicial review. As early as the Revolution, Englishmen and Americans were using the same words for different things ('representation' and 'constitution', for instance); and that was one reason why mere argument proved so futile in the seventeen-sixties and seventies. Beginning with the Revolution, America showed a disposition to experiment with institutions to improve on her colonial inheritance. Instead of 'broadening down from precedent to precedent', American institutions, social as well as governmental, seem to leap from experiment to experiment. The United States became a laboratory of democracy.

The American Revolution itself was an experiment, originally conceived as a means to the greater end of liberty. The republican form of government was a bold experiment in a world of monarchies. America was the first nation to try out the federal system on a large scale; and the successful working of her federal system is probably America's most important contribution to political science. America was the first nation to experiment with complete religious liberty, with manhood suffrage, with popular education. She was the first western nation to

break loose from the Balance of Power. Twenty years ago it seemed that this genius for political experiment had played itself out; that America had settled into smug satisfaction with things as they were. But in the last twenty years we have introduced woman suffrage and direct popular legislation—the initiative and referendum—we have abandoned *laissez-faire* for governmental regulation, and we have adopted prohibition, the workings of which seem to be watched with keen and not altogether disinterested scrutiny on this side of the Atlantic. It is too early as yet to say whether prohibition was a great reform or a great blunder; but say what you will of prohibition, America was the first of the greater nations to dare to vote for it.

The American Revolution is no new subject of study at Oxford, and it is a subject that seems to appeal to young men of each successive generation. It lacks some of the spectacular features of the French Revolution, being in the main a political movement, though economics underlay every phase of it. It brought about no social overturn and did not need to: for feudalism had been ironed out by the pressure of the wilderness. Nevertheless, the American Revolution is a dynamic, explosive movement, full of dramatic situations, conducted by leaders of remarkable foresight, courage, and constructive ability, and whose modes of thought and action more closely resemble those of the English-speaking peoples to-day than those of the leaders of any other revolution in history. Indeed the analogies to the recent events, particularly as to the aid that repression affords to a revolutionary party, are many and instructive. The entire movement raises questions very similar to those which responsible rulers of great nations to-day are being compelled to answer. How did it come about that those thirteen colonies of 1763, loving England far more than they loved one another, loyal to their king, glorying in their recent victory over the hereditary enemy to his house and religion, proud of their English nationality and privileges,



were within thirteen years pushed into union among themselves, rebellion against their king, alliance with France, and independence? To what extent were geographic and economic conditions responsible? To what extent the English ministries? the king? the colonial radicals? Was the English policy in truth tyrannical? Which side had the preponderance of legal, and which the preponderance of moral, justification? And, finally, was the Revolution inevitable? Scarcely any two historians have answered these questions alike, and it is difficult for any American or Englishman to approach them without emotional bias. Yet there is no mystery about the essential facts that led up to the Revolution; sufficient extracts from the sources have been published, and are accessible, to enable an intelligent man after a few weeks' hard reading to answer any of these questions (save the last) for himself.<sup>1</sup>

On the last question—was the Revolution inevitable?—most of the few Englishmen who have thought about it seem to have the decided opinion that it was not—that the Revolution was due to a temporary misunderstanding, and to a series of blunders by George III; or to a certain obliquity of vision and perversity of performance on the part of colonial leaders. I think that the Revolution was due to a variety of causes which rendered it, humanly speaking, inevitable; that is to say, inevitable without imaginative statesmanship of an order seldom attained in theory by historians, and never attained in practice by politicians. The Revolution was certainly not caused by any one man or group of men on either side; nor was

<sup>1</sup> I do not mean to assert that every determining factor in the Revolution has been brought to light; in the field of local and State history during the revolutionary era, in particular, there is much yet to be done. The Revolution and the colonial period are the most fruitful fields for original research on American history in England. The principal depositories of material have been rendered available through the handbooks issued by the Carnegie Institution and the Historical Manuscripts Commission; and there doubtless remain untouched mines of information in the Public Record Office and in private archives.

it the result of a misunderstanding ; indeed the American Whigs and English Tories seem to have understood each other's intentions and purposes very clearly. The only misunderstanding, a mutual one, was the belief that the other side would not or could not fight for more than a few months. A similar delusion has been a contributing cause to many great wars. To the success of the Revolutionary War, as distinct from the Revolution in the broader sense, one man and only one was essential—Washington. A man of few natural gifts, self-educated, somewhat slow-witted, but with a far-sightedness, an uncanny sense for choosing men and using them, an iron will, and a moral integrity, that were essential to our cause, and would have ennobled any cause. Washington, after being raised to a cloud-capped Olympus by historical myth-makers, has of late been re-humanized by more realistic historians. We now know that he had to wrestle not only with refractory conditions and men, but with another self: his victory only appears the greater.

Washington is by no means the only outstanding figure of the Revolutionary period. Our colonial history, after the generation of founders, is barren of interesting personalities ; but the Revolution brought to the front a group of leaders with very different degrees and kinds of ability, but all possessing qualities that make them live in literature and in history. Agitators like Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry ; Franklin the supreme diplomatist ; pamphleteers like Otis, Dickinson, Hamilton, and Paine ; soldiers and adventurers like Nathaniel Greene, Paul Jones, and Benedict Arnold ; loyalists like Count Rumford and Hutchinson ; thinkers and constructive patriots like John Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and John Marshall. From that generation, to the generation of Roosevelt, Wilson, and Justice Holmes, you will find American history uncommonly rich in personalities ; and fortunately these personalities are rendered vivid for us, not only through memoirs and letters, but through sound and interesting biographical literature, ranging in scope from the monumental biography

of Chief Justice Marshall by Senator Beveridge to the skilful biographical sketches by Gamaliel Bradford.

The American Revolution has much of interest apart from the breach with England and the diplomatic, military, and naval events. For the Revolution did not end with the winning of Independence by the united armies and navies of America and France. The constructive phase of it, which began with the drafting of the first State constitutions in 1776, does not end until the ratification of the first ten amendments to the Federal Constitution in 1791.

On the morrow of Independence America was left alone, in a hostile or indifferent world, to see if she could secure that liberty she had fought to win. The few years following the Peace of Paris decided this question. A social readjustment was necessary to fill the places of the departed Loyalists. A double economic readjustment was necessary; from a war to a peace basis, and from a colonial status, enjoying the privileges of imperial fellowship, to an independent status among nations with powerful navies, great merchant marines, and exclusive colonial systems. Financial readjustment was necessary, from paper to specie; and we had no specie. Political readjustment was necessary, and this was the most difficult. War and the new wine of liberty had set loose wild forces that seemed incapable of discipline or integration. The people were loath to entrust necessary governmental powers to the States; and the States, having refused certain powers to Parliament, were unwilling to grant them to any other central authority. Devolution and separation seemed the probable result. How was America rescued from this fate? What causes produced the reintegration of 1788? Search the correspondence of the period, and the debates of the Federal Convention of 1787, and the State ratifying convention of 1788. They are still throbbing with the pulse of class and sectional antagonism. They enable us to watch the building of the Constitution, and to assess the motives behind each clause.

When the Federal Constitution at last issued from the

Convention, it was not accepted with the alacrity that one would have expected from the incense that has since been burned before it. In many States there was a passionate campaign over ratification ; and so powerful were the prejudices against it that to-day its acceptance seems almost a miracle. It was no miracle. Men of strong will and subtle intelligence, some in the forefront of the debates, others behind the scenes, were consciously shaping the destiny of their country.

With the inauguration of Washington as President of the United States in 1789, the fruits of the Revolution were secured, so far as that generation was able to do it. The remaining decade of the eighteenth century was one of organization and consolidation, and a growing popular dissent to these tendencies and policies. The genius of this consolidating movement was Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton's romantic personality and life have attracted the myth-makers. His career, rationalizing as it does the yearnings of modern business men for an efficient oligarchy, has made him a hero of privileged classes on both sides of the Atlantic. Many good people seem to think that Hamilton won the War of Independence, wrote the Federal Constitution, had it ratified, elected Washington President, ran his administration, and saved the United States from Jacobinism. Hamilton was indeed a remarkable man, but his active influence began only when he became Secretary of the Treasury under Washington, and it continued several years longer than was beneficial. As a financier and an administrator he has no peer in American history, and what he accomplished was essential to the success of the Federal Government. But he made some cruel errors, and some of his policies had so little reference to the basic facts of American life or the vital needs of the people, as to make them resentful and suspicious of experts. Had Hamilton had his way in foreign policy, America would to all intents and purposes have entered the Second Coalition against the French Republic, and most probably would have marched an army into Spanish

America, to conquer what Thomas Jefferson afterwards acquired peaceably, through the Louisiana purchase. The means by which a nation advances, particularly in its adolescence, are far more important than the ends it pursues; and it was largely due to the courageous pacifism of Washington, John Adams, and Jefferson that the young Republic advanced to the rhythm of justice, and not to the rhythm of violence.

The conflict between Hamilton and Jefferson is a classic one in American history, and a significant one; for these two men represented the class and sectional cleavage which formed the party system. They represented also the two schools of political thought which have struggled for mastery to this day: the school of discipline and administrative energy, ruling the people for their own good through a governing class; and the school of undisciplined individual energy, restrained only by popular education, and a human nature supposedly expanding toward perfection. Jefferson's system, consciously created for a nation of pioneer farmers, was the less persistent of the two; but for many years it was the dominant tendency in American political and economic life. If we must personify history, we can best study America of that generation through the baffling personality, the strange mixture of realism and idealism, of simplicity and wiliness, of aristocratic tastes and democratic views, in the great Virginian apostle of democracy; the man who when composing his own epitaph made no mention of the fact that he had been Governor of Virginia, Minister to France, Secretary of State, Vice-President and President of the United States, but wrote simply 'Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia'.

A unique opportunity was afforded to fix the rhythm of Anglo-American relations in these early years of the Republic. It was fixed, for three generations; and the rhythm chosen was that of contentiousness. This was not

entirely the fault of one side, but it was unnecessary. Although the feeling of the American people was not friendly to Great Britain in 1783, the antipathy was recent, and could easily have been allayed—it was allayed in New England, where the anti-British feeling had been strongest. John Adams spoke from his heart, and he spoke for almost every American in public life, when, at his reception as American Minister by George III, he said: 'I hope I may be instrumental in restoring the old good nature and the old good humour between people, who though separated by an ocean, and under different governments, have the same language, a similar religion, and kindred blood.' But the English governments of the late eighteenth century refused to carry out the treaty of peace in good faith, refused to conclude a commercial treaty with the United States, and even withheld the common civilities of diplomatic intercourse. No British Minister was sent to the United States for almost ten years after the war, and the first one appointed almost brought on another war. But for Washington's resolute pacifism, war would have come in 1793. It was averted only through a treaty—Jay's of 1794—so humiliating to the United States that it cost Washington's popularity to get it ratified. Not that the British government during these years was hostile to the United States; its attitude may rather be characterized as one of contemptuous indifference, which is the very worst attitude to adopt toward a new or weak nation, which, like the America of 1790, is suffering from what the current jargon calls an 'inferiority complex'.

A little friendliness and consideration would have done so much toward healing the Anglo-American breach. A more prompt attention to complaints; a mere gesture of respect, would have averted the second Anglo-American conflict. This war of 1812 was declared by a new generation, against the wishes of the elder statesmen, mainly in order to vindicate its manhood. It was a war that barely moved the scales in the balance of power, but it accumulated much capital of ill feeling, and lost all opportunity of

establishing a tradition of Anglo-American amity in time to withstand the shock of an anti-British immigration.

After the world peace of 1815, America strode into her nineteenth-century pace. Her isolation became a fact. Washington had announced the policy of isolation in 1796; but in spite of him and his successors, the main issues of American domestic politics had been inseparable from foreign politics. After 1815 outstanding disputes with England and France were settled quietly, without becoming political issues. In 1823 George Canning invited the United States to make a joint *démarche* against the Holy Alliance. It is significant that the elder statesmen who were consulted were so flattered by this mark of attention from their ancient enemy as to favour acceptance; but John Quincy Adams, of the younger generation, induced the President to issue his famous message which contained the Monroe Doctrine.

Foreign policy, however, is a mere backwater in American history until the close of the century. Whoever stops his study of American history at 1815 would have little conception of the forces that have made the America of to-day.

The determining factor for some time to come was the Westward Advance.

In a sense, all American history is the story of westward expansion. The first Europeans who landed on our shores found conditions so radically different from those of Europe that their manner of living and thinking was instantly affected. The beaches of the Atlantic, as Professor Channing has observed, were the first western frontier. Antagonism between the interior region of pioneer log-cabins and the coastal region of mansion houses, counting-rooms, and shipyards goes back to the early eighteenth century. The pioneer's individualism, his self-sufficiency, his suspicion of government which came to him only through the tax-gatherer, his hatred of the Eastern capitalist to whom he owed money, have coloured

the economic and political thinking of American communities, even after the pioneer stage has been passed.

For a century and a half the westward advance was relatively slow. Only about 1760 did a flying column of backwoodsmen cross the Alleghanias into the Ohio valley, there to form a wedge of settlers between hostile Canadian-Indians and Spanish-Indians. By 1820 the tip of this wedge of settlement was pointing up the Missouri River; its northern slope followed the line of Lakes Ontario and Erie, its southern limb struck across Tennessee and Georgia to the Atlantic. (There was also an irregular belt of newly-settled territory in central Alabama and southern Mississippi, and an old-settled area in southern Louisiana.) Considerable areas within the original limits of the United States, both north-west and south-west, were still unsettled; and the trans-Mississippi region had hardly been touched. Yet within thirty years not only had these older areas been filled with farms and plantations, but there was a solid belt of settled States west of the Mississippi, and the frontier had leaped the Rockies to the Pacific coast and the Hawaiian Islands. Thirty years more suffices to fill the intervening territory, and by 1890 the frontier had disappeared. A parallel movement, retarded about a generation, was going on in Canada.

I hardly need tell you that this western advance was the most characteristically American movement of the nineteenth century, and the greatest folk-migration since that of the Germanic hordes. It makes the United States, as Frederick J. Turner has written, 'a huge page in the history of society,' from the stone age to industrialism. To attempt to explain it is an absorbing game. One may trace the effects of immigration from Europe, of new modes of transportation, such as canal, river steamboat, and railway, which helped the pioneer to his destination, and enabled him to market his produce; of a progressively liberal policy with the public land; of the removal of the Indian tribes, and the border warfare that it involved. The movement itself is full of strange incidents, and it



produced picturesque types and remarkable individuals. Daniel Boone, Samuel Houston, Abraham Lincoln, James J. Hill, each represent one great division of the pioneer army that filed in steady procession across the continent: the division of hunters, fur traders, and Indian fighters, the division of cattle drovers, ranchers and lumbermen; the division of farmers that occupied the land, and the industrial division of railroad builders, city builders, manufacturers that destroyed what ordered beauty and simplicity the farmers had brought to mountain, plain, and prairie. Nor should we forget such warriors of the vanishing race as Tecumseh, Black Hawk, Red Cloud, and Sitting Bull. Our first interest in American history, at the age of six or thereabouts, was in the redskins, and in those conflicts for race supremacy that aroused the primitive little absolute will in us, aching to be mad and heroic. Who that saw it will ever forget that major thrill of 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show', the attack of the Indians on the Deadwood coach?

There is enough of the child in us still, I trust, to love these picturesque incidents; but there is more in the western movement than picturesque incidents. By opening new areas to the production of grain and beef, it altered the economy of the East and of Europe. In many ways it determined the character and the destiny of America. The advancing frontier, that No Man's Land where the only law was force and cunning, explains the strange streak of lawlessness that runs through American society—paralleled by an equally passionate yearning for law and order even at the cost of liberty. It explains to some extent the restlessness of America. We Americans got the habit of moving when our European ancestors tore themselves from their farmsteads in the old world. The constant pull of the West has confirmed the habit, and has made American society fluid. The average American to-day is living in a different spot from his birthplace. Very likely no two of his American ancestors were born in

the same State. A house that has sheltered the same family for a century is a curiosity.

In political history and thought the westward movement has been a determining factor. Andrew Jackson, a typical frontiersman of 'crude savour and defiant aspect' under his Southern manners, reached the Presidency in 1829 on a tidal wave of frontier revolt against the bankers and elder statesmen of the Virginia and New England dynasties. In 1830 the President, the Vice-President, the Secretary of State, and the Chief Justice were men born in log-cabins. And the American Civil War would never have taken place but for this western advance; for it arose out of the contention between slaveholders and free labourers for the trans-Mississippi West.

Slavery may well have died out in the Southern States through wastefulness (as it did in the North) but for the invention of the cotton-gin. Hitherto the long-staple cotton, which could only be grown near the sea-coast, had alone paid the expense of separating seed from fibre by hand labour; but the cotton-gin enabled the short-staple cotton, which could be grown almost anywhere south of the thirty-sixth parallel, to be produced for the Lancashire and New England markets. Cotton growing became the greatest single interest in the United States; and as negro slavery appeared to be the only available form of labour, prosperity became, in the eyes of contemporaries, bound up with the safeguarding and expansion of slavery. Through the connexion of cotton-growers with the manufacturing and financial interests of the north-east, and through the market their plantations gave to the corn of the north-west, they were able to control a powerful section of Northern public opinion. So the western advance was not a mere spreading-out of population at the expense of the Indians; it was the onward march of two civilizations, the one based on chattel slavery, and the other on what you would call in Europe peasant proprietorship. Each party sought to outflank the other in the west; to secure this or that territory to slave or free

labour; for free labour could not compete with the slave-cultivated plantations.

We can watch the struggle as reflected in national party politics at Washington. A compromise line from the Mississippi to the Rockies was drawn in 1820. The Mexican war revived the issue, and brought another compromise in 1850; in which the North obtained the admission of California as a free State at the cost of a fugitive slave law so drastic as to make the cause of slavery abolition at last respectable. The few courageous men like Garrison and Phillips, who had dared to speak out on the subject of slavery, who had scorned popularity and braved mobs to attest America's great shame, were morally right, but politically wrong, in denouncing the compromise of 1850; for that compromise let time fight for freedom.

Whilst politicians flattered themselves that the slavery issue was shelved, the onward push of population was creating a situation that would admit of no compromise. The north-west was filling up rapidly, and with peoples dedicated to freedom; men of the New England strain from the eastern States, immigrants from the British Isles, German liberals despairing of their homeland after '48. Railways, pushing westward with the people, re-oriented western commerce. New York, already the gateway to the West, replaced New Orleans as the outlet of the West. Chicago, where Cyrus McCormick in 1847 began to manufacture his reaping machine (free labour's answer to the cotton-gin) increased twentyfold in population during the 'fifties. The north-eastern States, too, were growing rapidly in wealth, population, and power. Pittsburg was already black and prosperous. Connecticut had a score of miniature Birminghams. The manufacturing cities of Manchester, Lowell, and Lawrence had been built by men whose descendants became ambassadors, university presidents, and poets. And in the Boston shipyards was perfected the noblest and swiftest sailing-vessel of all time, the Yankee clipper ship, stately as a cathedral, beautiful as a terraced cloud, the wonder and the joy of man as she

swept around the Horn to 'Frisco, around the Cape to Melbourne, smashing every record for every trade route.

The slavery struggle was renewed over Kansas, whose status—free or slave—was bound up with the question whether a trans-continental railway should begin in slave or free territory. This time, Northern and Southern emigrants marched in military formation, and there was bloodshed; particularly when that belated Ironside, John Brown of Ossawatimie, appeared on the scene. Kansas was won for free labour. To stay the westward advance of slavery one only needed to wipe out the political salient that the Democratic party still held in the north. That was the work of the new Republican party, which in 1860 elected to the Presidency its candidate, Abraham Lincoln. The South, regarding this check to slavery's advance as a threat at slavery itself, declared its independence; and the struggle for the west was transformed into a four-years' civil war which preserved the Union, and wiped out chattel slavery.

The American Civil War is a fascinating study. You have the intensely dramatic spectacle of the South, inferior in population and resources, blockaded, cut in two early in the war, united by the knowledge that she was fighting for very existence, for race supremacy; yet fighting cleanly and nobly, under such leaders as 'Stonewall' Jackson, Jefferson Davis, and Robert E. Lee. On the other side you have the miracle of people fighting with no such primitive purpose as existence, dominion, or revenge; but for two ideals, liberty and union; fighting doggedly a war that could only be victorious if the enemy's country were overrun; a war that would have been lost if concluded by a treaty. If this war had nothing else of interest, it would outlast many others in human annals through the amazing personalities of Grant and Lincoln. General Grant, whose centenary we have celebrated this year, is an unique instance of an obscure failure in middle life rising suddenly to pre-eminence, through innate character and will, in a profession that he heartily disliked. This year, the centenary of his birth, our thoughts revert to Grant, dogged

and victorious before Vicksburg, ruthless and imperturbable in the wilderness, superbly magnanimous at Appomattox. But I like most to think of Grant at his modest cottage in New York State, fighting the last battle of his life, for honour against death. He had contracted with a publisher to write his autobiography, in order to pay the creditors of a bankrupt firm of which he had been a silent partner; and as he lay on his death-bed, tortured by cancer of the throat, he finished the last pages of the greatest of military memoirs since Caesar's, only four days before death claimed him.

You will enjoy studying (as many Englishmen have already done) the career and the personality of Abraham Lincoln; who came to the Presidency untried and unskilled, hampered by politics in the choice of his Cabinet and of his generals; surrounded at first by men who distrusted him and one another, attacked with a virulence and unscrupulousness seldom known even in politics, yet ever increasing his moral ascendancy; almost broken by the burden of a war that he loathed to the depth of his soul, yet never losing his humanity and his humility; buoyed up by Christian faith and a sense of humour; the supreme product of democracy.

When a fanatic killed Lincoln, the vanquished South lost its best friend. Lincoln gone, there was no barrier to counter-fanaticism. The tragic episode of Reconstruction began. A policy of hatred and revenge was applied in the name of right and justice. Not all the fault was on one side. The proud women of the South, unconscious of defeat, must share responsibility with Northern abolitionists. In the name of democracy the ballot was granted the freedmen; plantation negroes who could neither read nor write occupied the seats of the mighty in State capitols. The situation became intolerable. Finally the logic of facts caused the federal armies to be withdrawn; and a white terror forced the negroes out of politics. But the harm could not be undone. Reconstruction brought Southern race relations into the rhythm of violence, as the annual

crop of lynchings attests; and it formed a political *bloc*, the so-called 'solid South', which serves to perpetuate worn-out party distinctions. But, after all, the revolted States were placed under no permanent disability; since 1877 their status in the Union has been no different from that of the most loyal commonwealth.

This period immediately following the Civil War is one upon which we like least to dwell; for beside this tragic episode of reconstruction, it was marked by decadence in public life and in business ethics: by political corruption, by waste of national resources, and by an expansion and exploitation that achieved great material results at the expense of humanity. The north and west, once rid of war and the slave menace, renewed the conquest of the continent with accelerated speed and avidity. Men of imagination and practical ability grasped and developed the latent resources of their country, with the aid of steam, electricity, the Bessemer steel process, and countless other inventions. Vast fortunes were made, and some of them were lost. Within a few years certain corporations had greater budgets than many of the States, and employed more men than any State. Depending as they did on grants, charters, and franchises obtained from legislatures, the relations of business with politics became of a dubiously intimate nature. Politicians were not slow to observe the profits to be made from granting favours to capital and blackmailing those who merely wished to be let alone. At the same time hordes of immigrants who remained in the industrial centres were organized by professional politicians into veritable armies which turned elections as they wished. In certain States a neo-feudalism was created; only a corporation's vassal could attain elective or appointive office. 'The stockholder has stepped into the place of the warlike barons,' wrote Emerson in 1867. 'The nobles shall not any longer, as feudal lords, have power of life and death over the churls, but now, in another shape, as capitalists, shall in all love and peace eat them up as before. Nay, govern-

ment itself becomes the resort of those whom government was meant to restrain.'

The assassination of President Garfield, in 1881, aroused the country to the need of civil service reform, and former standards of service were revived in the federal government. But when Mr. Bryce's *American Commonwealth* appeared, in 1888, several State governments were still practically owned by joint-stock corporations, and the larger cities were sinks of corruption.

This period of accelerated growth is not lacking in high lights. It is dominated, not by politicians, but by railroad builders like Hill, Harriman, and (in Canada) Lord Strathcona; by iron masters like Carnegie and Frick, by Rockefeller the oil king, and by financiers of stupendous daring, like Gould and Morgan. Though the age of steel mills and oil wells and sprawling, ugly cities (the sky-scraper came with the new century) it also includes the last phase of the frontier, in the great plains, and in the Southwest and California, differing in scenery and climate from the rest of the United States as does Southern Spain from England; the Southwest where the place-names, the architecture, even the laws, still bear the imprint of old Spain.

This was the frontier of the Texas cattle range, the *vaquero* and the broncho, of herds of long-horn cattle numbering hundreds of thousands, of cattle kings with their armies of light-triggered cowboys, of the round-up and the long trail, of Apache Indians on the war-path in Arizona, and Sioux at bay in the Black Hills of Dakota, of Custer's last stand on the Little Big Horn. A lawless, ruthless age, from the water-front of San Francisco and the mining camps of Nevada to the strikes, rate-wars, and slums of the East. What does it all mean? What fabric can the historian weave of these tangled, exotic yarns?

Protests were not lacking against this wasteful engrossment of national resources, this growing power and insolence of corporate wealth. Within fifteen years of the close of the war there came strikes of unparalleled extent and violence in the East and in the West, third-party move-

ments starting amongst farmers who found their profits eaten up by railway freights on their produce and the interest on their mortgages. A dozen third parties have arisen in the West since the Civil War, to strut a brief hour on the political stage ; but they have all gone down before the Republican and Democratic parties, or been swallowed up by them. The two major parties, however, have been changed in the process. Observe, for instance, the Populist party of the 'nineties, a party that originated in that home of radical farmers, Kansas ; crude and goat-tish, the butt of the Eastern press. It did not last long ; but almost all its promised reforms—railway regulation, parcels post, progressive income tax, State credit for farmers—have since been adopted through the instrumentality of the two major parties. This seems to be the accepted rôle of third parties in our history—to build up a following and a vote, and then frighten the major parties into competing for their following by adopting the reforms.

To curb and to guide into public service rather than private emolument the enormous aggregations of wealth under corporate control, the powers of government, particularly of the federal government, have been very greatly increased in recent years. The demand for regulating legislation has come largely from sections and classes which were traditionally wedded to pioneer individualism ; but which have turned to the government for protection against private interests of increasing magnitude. Conversely, the interests whose profits were threatened by the proposed regulations, and which in many instances owed their prosperity to public land grants, protective tariffs, and other governmental favours, drew upon the Manchester school of economic thought to reinforce pioneer prejudices against paternalism. The political and legal history of the United States since 1880 has been largely a resultant of these two schools of thought and practice. *Laissez-faire* has prevailed in the courts of justice, which have refused to enforce as contrary to a clause of the



fourteenth amendment to the Constitution,<sup>1</sup> regulatory and protective laws which had long been a matter of course in European legislation. Indeed, in one case, involving a State law restraining labour in bakeries to ten hours a day, Justice Holmes of the Supreme Court, a consistent dissenter against judicial usurpation of the legislative power, felt called upon to remark that the fourteenth amendment did not 'enact Mr. Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*'.

Despite judicial rebuffs, an enormous mass of restraining and regulating law has been enacted—trust and child labour laws, minimum wage, workmen's compensation, pure food, and hours of labour laws. The federal character of the United States government makes the policy of regulation exceedingly difficult, and in practice often chaotic; for the regulatory powers of the federal government over private business are still limited to whatever may be brought in under the heading of inter-state and foreign commerce. Such matters as insurance, public health, wages and hours of labour in factories, chartering and financing of corporations, are still regulated by the legislatures, administrative boards, and judiciaries of forty-eight States, with not infrequent interference from the federal judiciary.

The statesman who has been most identified with the reforming and regulating movement of the last generation is Theodore Roosevelt. His fairly quiet and very effective work in various government departments was interrupted by spectacular service in the short but exciting Spanish-American war of 1898. To the Presidency, in 1901, he brought a broad culture, a boundless enthusiasm, a pervasive popularity, and a highly nervous energy. Under the banner of a 'new nationalism', he stimulated popular enthusiasm for conserving instead of squandering the nation's resources, for a 'square deal' to all classes,

<sup>1</sup> 'Nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.' The fifth amendment applies similar language to the federal government.

and for the relentless pursuit of 'malefactors of great wealth'. As his administration recedes into history, one finds that it produced more noise than results. But unquestionably the tone of public life and the standards of public service were far higher in the generation of Roosevelt than in the generation of Conkling and Blaine. Mr. Roosevelt was also responsible for a more vigorous foreign policy ('Speak softly, but carry a big stick!') and a larger army and navy than the American people had hitherto permitted. When the diplomatic history of his administration is better known, I think that it will be agreed that the United States, by the personality of Mr. Roosevelt and the power he wielded as President, became a makeweight in the European system some ten years before the world war.

1922 / What permanent effect the world war may have had on American history, it is still too early for an historian to perceive. We now seem to be pulling out of the general topsy-turviness of armistice days into 'normalcy'. But has normal American life since colonial days been anything but movement and change? It may be that the war merely accelerated tendencies that had been gathering momentum during the generation since the buffalo disappeared. The old local and sectional groupings, which used to be the basis of political parties, seem to be breaking up into nation-wide class and racial groupings. American society is becoming more static, less ecstatic. Liberalism and imperialism are still struggling for control of our policy toward Latin America. Perhaps of greatest significance to-day, on the morrow of a war 'to make the world safe for democracy', is the search for something in addition to political democracy, as the key to national happiness and progress. Formerly practically every American (save belated Tories) assumed that we had the key to all problems in manhood or universal suffrage, and institutions responsible to the popular will. The path of reform led merely to the tinkering of institutions, or the creation of new ones; the passage of laws, and the broaden-

ing of the franchise. The great mass of Americans are still satisfied with their democratic formulae. One group of intellectuals still believes in the healing power of democracy, provided the original ingredients of the prescription, freedom of speech, of elections, and of the press, be maintained. But another group of advanced thinkers is asking the awkward question, what is the popular will? Is there one, apart from group propaganda? And it is pointed out that political democracy either cannot or will not find a remedy for the periodic swing between poverty and prosperity, unemployment and scarcity of labour, overproduction and scarcity of goods; and that governments are often helpless before combinations of capital and combinations of labour.

Whatever solution may be found to these problems in America, it is safe to say that the means will not be wholly political, and the result will not be communism. It is also increasingly evident that these problems are common to all Western nations, and that their solution by national units is not likely to be found.

Americans in the past have taken themselves and their democracy for granted; they have been opportunists in a land of opportunity. The current of our national life has been so swift as to develop that sort of quick thinking and instinctive motion by which a practised raftsmen avoids the rocks as he shoots the rapids. Now we have passed the rapids of our river of life, into the level reaches that lead to the mysterious ocean of the future. For our deep-sea voyage we shall need clear, sound thinking, expert seamanship, moral courage, and the wisdom that comes of experience; the experience of our sister ships as well as our own. In order to develop these qualities and aptitudes, we need not break with our past. On the contrary, we shall need all of the blithesomeness and fearlessness, the kindness and simplicity, the passionate yearning for righteousness, that have redeemed our past from inanity and materialism. America, in order to fulfil the bright promise of her birth, must grow out of her youth

slowly, and never quite outgrow it. She must be linked to the living, fruitful spirit of her past, not to its lifeless forms and rigid institutions.

We who study American history, in so far as we can throw upon it the light of human knowledge and understanding, shall be creating the future out of that past ; not only for America, but for all peoples who aspire to a better life.



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